

Youth Policy

and

Empowerment Project

Findings and

Recommendations

Ideas and suggestions from Maine youth designed to help schools and communities enhance and improve school alcohol and drug policy

Endorsed by the following organizations:

Bureau of Liquor Enforcement
Maine Communities for Children
Maine Underage Drinking Task Force

Introduction

In June 2001, AdCare Educational Institute was awarded a grant from the Maine State Office of Substance Abuse (Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services) that was designed to decrease underage drinking. The goal of the project is to change factors in the social, legal, economic and political environment that encourage, enable or support underage drinking. The philosophy of the proposal is that, because underage drinking is a problem affecting the youth population, the most effective way to analyze and improve the environment is to directly involve the youth in the discussion.

The grant application proposed the creation of an active, diverse group of students from around the state of Maine; train them in public speaking, facilitation, and policy issues; provide opportunity for them to develop Findings and Recommendations about school drug and alcohol policy; and provide transportation and support in their efforts to work with individual schools to implement some of their Recommendations.

The following document contains the Findings and Recommendations of the appropriately named Youth Policy and Empowerment Group. It is a series of statements that supports and incorporates the policy strengthening document: *“Taking Responsibility: Standards for Ethical and Responsible Behavior in Maine Schools”* which was created by the Department of Education in cooperation with the Center for Global Ethics and Maine school staff and students, and distributed to all school districts in Maine for implementation in 2001.

Acknowledgments

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The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in the publication are those of the youth group and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Maine Office of Substance Abuse (BDS), AdCare Educational Institute, or groups endorsing this project.

Hallmark A: **

Collectively Identified Core Values are the corner stone of all school and community efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.

Youth Finding:

Young people are the recipients of mixed messages regarding alcohol use from tv, radio, store advertisements, peers and adults. A community without agreement on its core values is not unified or prepared in an effort to create and sustain a drug and alcohol policy that combats this misinformation and promotes consistent messages.

Youth Recommendation:

- Gather representative community members and come to agreement on core values regarding underage alcohol use.

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Use a facilitator, moderator or and/or counselor to guide the process of determining core values
- Plan the annual event in combination with another draw. For example: pot luck dinner, open house, conference night, etc

**** Hallmarks are taken directly from “Taking Responsibility” and represent the principles and process of developing policy based on core values. The findings and recommendations represent the views specific to school policy relative to alcohol use.**

Hallmark B:

Entire community is welcomed and meaningfully involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

Youth Finding:

There are four major populations that are relevant to the discussion of drug and alcohol policy: regular users, nonusers, those considering use and those affected through family or friends. Often, one or more of these populations is excluded from the discussion and decision making surrounding drug and alcohol policy, leaving incomplete the process of value identification, standard setting and enforcement that accompanies policy making.

Youth Recommendation:

- Facilitate a discussion within the community about value identification, and its relation to drug and alcohol policy that is inclusive of diverse views.

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Use a trained facilitator, moderator or school counselor to aid in discussion
- Community members involved should be diverse in age and background
- Discussion should include acknowledgment of the four identified populations: users, nonusers, undecided and affected persons

Hallmark C:

Students are welcomed and involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

Youth Finding:

Students are often either absent or overlooked in discussions of value identification, standard setting and enforcement.

Youth Recommendation(s):

- Youth need a legitimate voice in the process of creating drug and alcohol policy
- Enforcement of policy should not only lead to punishments or negative sanctions, but also to options for treatment

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Create an ongoing group of youth that will stay informed of drug and alcohol issues
- Use this group each year to help educate other students about the steps involved in creating and implementing drug and alcohol policies
- Allow the group, on a continual basis, to act as a liaison between students and administration regarding drug and alcohol policy

Hallmark D:

There is an active partnership between schools and parents.

Youth Finding:

Discussion between parents and schools is often limited to certain extracurricular activities or to punishment situations. Parents often feel little investment in existing policy and sometimes find themselves in an adversarial position where their child is involved.

Youth Recommendation:

- Each year, parents need to be welcomed and included in the discussion of drug and alcohol issues and their relation to school policy

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Use public events such as open house, parent nights, and assemblies as forums for students to plan and participate in discussions about core values, community substance abuse norms, and conflicting messages about alcohol use and non-use with other students and parents on yearly basis
- The student population and the parent population should have time to discuss drug and alcohol issues separately and then come together to listen to both perspectives

Hallmark E:

All adults who interact with students, in and out of school, strive to model and reinforce ethical and responsible behavior.

Youth Finding:

If all community members are involved in the conversation about core values using the previous recommendations and suggestions, the outcome will be more ethical adult behavior.

Youth Recommendation:

- none

Youth Suggested Action:

- none

Hallmark F:

Teachers are authorized and expected to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.

Youth Finding:

Teachers sometimes discuss their private lives in front of students, touching on inappropriate drug and alcohol related topics, and making the teaching of ethical behavior confusing and ineffective.

Youth Recommendation:

- Youth need to have a legitimate voice in the discussion of the ethical behavior of teachers and in standard setting for teacher behavior

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Include students in a discussion of the identification of ethical behavior of teachers and in the development of a teacher Code of Conduct
- Provide a yearly forum for teacher discussion or feedback regarding the conflict that they may feel as "role models" and their use of alcohol or other substances
- Provide training for teachers so that they know the warning signs for alcohol and drug abuse and the appropriate steps to follow in reporting such abuse

Hallmark G:

Efforts to promote ethical and responsible behavior are an integrated part of the school's curriculum and culture and are not viewed as "extra".

Youth Finding:

Drugs and alcohol are consistently marketed to youth, thus their inclusion in curriculum needs to be consistent enough to counteract such advertising.

Youth Recommendation:

Implement drug and alcohol curriculum that is more consistent throughout the year and includes discussion of policy making from core value identification through enforcement of policies and laws.

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Collaborate yearly with local law enforcement to improve the understanding of drug and alcohol laws within the school and community
- Drug and alcohol related educational presentations need to be included in school life regularly for all ages
- Use substance abuse counselors, peers, and recovering youth to educate the school community about drugs and alcohol

Hallmark H:

Ethical and responsible student behavior is actively promoted and recognized.

Youth Finding:

Emphasis is concentrated on athletic and academic achievements and rarely includes recognition of ethical behavior.

Youth Recommendation:

- Provide reward system for students who demonstrate ethical behavior

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Publicly present awards that recognize ethical and responsible behavior in school and in the community
- Create a system that allows students to nominate and present awards to their peers in recognition of ethical behavior

Hallmark I:

Teaching and learning ethical and responsible behavior in relation to drugs and alcohol begins in early childhood.

Youth Finding:

Young students need to learn to recognize ethical behavior in the primary grades because it becomes more difficult for high school students, who may have already developed unhealthy behaviors, to change this late in their development.

Youth Recommendation:

- Use an ongoing reward system for ethical behaviors for grade school children

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Use identified high school student leaders to help educate junior high and elementary students on ethics and drug and alcohol related topics
- Publicly present awards for ethical behavior in school or in the community to junior high and elementary students

Hallmark J:

Ethical behavior is exhibited in the classroom and beyond the classroom.

Youth Finding:

Ethical behavior will be an outcome of the previously listed recommendations.

Youth Recommendation:

- none

Youth Suggested Action:

- none

Hallmark K:

The drug and alcohol policy disciplinary process is interventionist**, inclusive, impartial, consistent and educational.

Youth Finding:

The drug and alcohol policy disciplinary process is rarely consistent with the fundamentals of justice listed in Hallmark K.

Youth Recommendation:

- Review the drug and alcohol policy disciplinary process with the community identified core values and the youth recommendations in mind so that it can become more interventionist, inclusive, impartial, consistent and educational.

Youth Suggested Actions:

- Write procedures into policy that support rather than simply punish students who are willing to accept help for drug and alcohol related problems
- Hold awareness meetings to inform students of treatment options
- Provide a drug counselor in the school
- Develop or refine a system of referral so that a student can inform the appropriate people that a friend may need help without fear of persecution

**** Interventionist refers to a procedure other than punishment.**

Hallmark L:

Outcomes of the drug and alcohol policy are well-defined and assessed regularly.

Youth Finding:

Students do not have a voice in assessment of policy outcomes.

Youth Recommendation:

- Create and utilize a system that legitimately involves students in the regular assessment of drug and alcohol policy

Youth Suggested Action:

- Monitor students who have sought out help for a drug or alcohol problem and are in recovery or in transition
- Involve the student drug and alcohol advisory committee** yearly in collecting and analyzing feedback from youth population regarding the success of the drug and alcohol policy

****Same as the group of youth discussed in Hallmark C as part of the *Youth Suggested Actions*.**